

### VOICE OF THE PEOPLE (LETTER)

#### Tests Can't Measure Immigrants' Patriotism

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Chicago Tribune

August 20, 2004

Chicago -- [Georgie Anne Geyer's column "Now citizenship will have meaning"](#) (Commentary, Aug. 6) is an affront to all patriotic immigrants who have struggled with the citizenship process, and to educators and advocates like us who have been working on ensuring that this process remains fair and accessible.

Immigrants come to the United States because they value the freedom and opportunity that all too often they cannot enjoy in their native lands. But newcomers often face great challenges in coming to this country.

For many, English is not their native language, and learning English is a difficult process. This is especially true for many immigrants who have had limited educational opportunities even in their native language and country. For immigrants and refugees who grew up amid poverty and strife, education simply is not available.

Yet for immigrants from all over the world, U.S. citizenship is the culmination of a lifelong dream. The U.S. is truly their home, and nothing expresses the depth of attachment and patriotism that they feel toward our nation more than U.S. citizens. Anyone who has ever attended a naturalization ceremony or worked with an immigrant studying for the citizenship interview will recognize how seriously new citizens take their naturalization. For Geyer to insinuate otherwise is truly offensive.

As educators and advocates who work with immigrants aspiring to U.S. citizenship, we know full

well the problems with the current test. The immigration service does not administer the test uniformly across the country, so immigrants who apply at different offices, or even get interviews with different officers in the same district, may have vastly different experiences. All too often, immigration officers are not well-trained to consistently administer and evaluate the naturalization tests. And too many of the history and government questions are ambiguous or irrelevant to good citizenship.

We want to make sure that any changes that our government makes to the citizenship process will not deny the dream of U.S. citizenship to those who meet all the legal eligibility requirements but have not had the opportunity for formal education. Unfortunately the immigration service has been slow to address the concerns we have raised about those fervently patriotic but less educated immigrants who might struggle with any new test.

For the first few years of the revision process, the immigration service failed to consult at all with adult educators, the teachers who work every day with immigrants to build their English skills and their knowledge of American history and government. It has been only after fierce advocacy that we have gained a voice in the process. Yet we must continue to deal with an agency that had initially proposed test content that was above high school level and draft questions that even many native-born U.S. citizens could not answer correctly.

More basically, can any test truly gauge the loyalty and patriotism that Geyer demands of new U.S. citizens? Is it more important for prospective citizens to know who the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court is, or (as we have seen among the thousands of foreign-born U.S. troops in Iraq) to be willing to serve and die for their new homeland?

Tests can only measure knowledge or skills. They cannot measure emotional attachment and commitment to one's country. Despite what Geyer suggests, citizenship always has been meaningful--and no testing changes can give that meaning to our new citizens, or take it away.